

6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER, C CYCLE, MAY 1, 2016

1st Reading: Acts 15:1-2, 22-29 [It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and us not to burden you]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 67 "O God, let all the nations praise you."

2nd Reading: Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23 [I saw the holy city ... the glory of God gave it light and its lamp was the Lamb]

Gospel: John 14:23-29 [The Advocate, the Holy Spirit will teach you everything... do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid]

♪ I want to see the brightness of God; I want to look at Jesus.

Clear Sun of righteousness, shine on my path, and show me the way to the Father.

In him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike.

The Lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus. ♪



The name of that song is "I want to walk as a child of the light." I was led to sing it because of the reading from the book of Revelation. Both the 2nd verse [which I sang] and the refrain refer to images in that reading. "*The city had no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb.*"

The song makes it personal - "*clear sun of righteousness* [that's SUN, the star that shines on us during the day] *shine on MY path and show ME the way to the Father... The Lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*"

The book of revelation is often quoted by people who want to predict the end of the world [and they have to revise their predictions every time the date passes, as it has for centuries] and some of its bizarre & flamboyant symbols have been applied literally to events & people down through the ages. But the book is really a patchwork of references and allusions to the Old Testament. Some scholars have said it really belongs between the Old Testament and the Gospels and comes from the community that followed John the Baptist.

To understand what it is saying, we need to know that it is written in code for a people who are in crisis and suffer under the oppression of Rome. Many of the symbols could be understood only by the church of the first century. In a way, it was encrypted & we don't know the passwords any more. It was written this way so the oppressors would not understand that they were being mocked.

If we understand that it is not a literal prediction of the last days but rather a poetic reflection on how to deal with crisis & hardship in every age,

the message & the meaning can be a blessing to us in the 21st century.

I know a man who has spent many years in prison. He has faced his crimes & tried to turn his life around, even earning a college degree while there. Because of a broken system, his release date has been postponed. We were in court with him on April 22 to support him in an appeal that could secure his release.

When I talked with him this past week, he told me that during the hearing, he kept looking at the words on the wall behind the judge, IN GOD WE TRUST. They were in very large print, in bas relief. Ironically, the same words are on *all* of our money - even though many in our world trust more in money than in God.

My friend has survived the violence & hardship of the prison system because he put his trust in God & Christ. And those who care about him - including some staff in the prison, & those of us who visit & have taught him - have needed to trust in God over and over in order to survive our frustration.

One of the people who has been a clear sign to me of the presence of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is his lawyer, a woman who has worked for Legal Aid for 30 years. As I read her arguments and saw her compassion, I was reminded that one of the meanings of the Greek word, "*Paraclete*", - one of the titles of the Holy Spirit - is Advocate or "defense attorney".

The first reading tells us about a crisis in the community in Antioch: Were the people who joined the Way of Christ required to keep the whole Law of Moses?

Imagine Peter, James, the other apostles, Martha and Mary of Bethany, Mary the mother of Jesus, Paul and Barnabas discussing that question. They were all Jews. Their ancestors, not many generations before, had died rather than eat pork or refuse to circumcise a new believer - because it would have been a denial of their religion.

They were asked to trust in God to guide them on the way of Christ. They had to let go of trusting in the *familiar* ways of living their traditions in order to find ways of living their faith appropriate to the culture, the time & the people who were becoming disciples of Christ.

They had to refuse to put their trust in the fear that a new way of following Christ would cause the church to fall apart. Finally, they had to trust in the Spirit of God & Christ to lead them to a *new* way of living out the core values of the Gospel they had received.

They responded to the Crisis by saying with their lives, IN GOD WE TRUST.

We shouldn't be surprised that we still have to face change and crisis, but today we can count on the same Spirit the guided the apostles to help us as we discern issues like who is called to be ordained as deacon or priest, who is called to pastor a parish, or who is in communion with the church.

Each of the crises we face in the Church, in our families & in the world asks the same questions: Who do you trust? Who do I trust? Who do we trust?

The Spirit answers clearly in the reading from the Acts - "*Trust Me! I will give you the light and strength you need, once you risk entering into the messy process of discernment.*"

Jesus promises us the help of the same Spirit when he says in the Gospel, "*The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit will teach you everything & remind you of all that I told you.*" Pope Francis is calling the whole Church to enter into the same process.

I visited with Fr. Joe Girzone - who recently died - some years ago [He is the author of the *Joshua* books]. He told us about an elderly German woman who said, in effect, "*Some Protestants worship the Bible, while some Catholics worship the church, and Jesus can get lost in the shuffle.*" It was a strong statement, a challenging one, but it asks me and you the same question, "Who do you trust?"

Are we being called to trust in an *institution*? Or to trust the Lord who started it, is still with it and speaks through it. Are we being called to trust a set of words, a translation of ancient texts, the Bible? Or are we being called to put our trust in the message for us that is revealed through the book when we prayerfully listen to what it is saying to us in this time & place. We are called to trust the Spirit who *still* speaks - through the Bible & in our lives.

Who do we trust? A human being? Even Jesus said: The Father is greater than I - that was not a denial of his divinity, it was a promise that his presence in the Spirit would be greater than his visible, tangible presence in the flesh. Jesus of Nazareth had to ascend to the Father, so that Christ the **Lord** could be with the Church. That's what we celebrate on Ascension Thursday this week.

I trust the Christ who has made a home in my heart and speaks not only through Jesus who walked with a few people over 2000 years ago, but who speaks in my deepest heart & *through* the companions and the leaders the Spirit gives me on my life journey.

Who do *you* trust? Who do *we* trust?

♪ *I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus.*

God set the stars to give light to the world; the star of my life is Jesus.

In him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike.

The Lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus. ♪

